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Computer program 'Discover' counsels UM students of careers

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Discover.rl

COMPUTER PROGRAM 'DISCOVER'
COUNSELS UM STUDENTS ON CAREERS

By Julie Heath
UM News and Publications

MISSOULA--

How do I fit into the world of work?

This question expresses the frustrations many general-education students face on college campuses. Students without an answer often drop out of college.

At the University of Montana students are getting help in finding an answer in the form of a "counselor" capable of guiding them through exercises to assess their interests, values and abilities and supplying them with immediate information on how their responses relate to careers.

The "counselor" is a computer program leased by Special Services, a federally funded project sponsored on campus by the College of Arts and Sciences. The computer program, called "Discover," was created by the American College Testing Program (ACT).

"Discover" provides information on careers, but Doug Beed, Special Services counselor, emphasized that the program "is not a tool designed to channel the user into a specific career." Rather, it expands the user's knowledge about careers and the education required to enter specific fields.

(over)

discover--add one

Ray Carlisle, director of Special Services, agrees.

"In my mind it's just the opposite of a channeling system," he said.

"Instead, it broadens the students' choices."

Discover provides guidance in four areas: identifying interests, searching occupations available to college majors, comparing careers and values, and searching for educational institutions.

Do I like to work with ideas, things, people or data?

To find out, a student answers the 90 questions of the interest inventory. Using the responses, Discover shows the student where his or her interests lie on the "world-of-work map," a pie-shaped graph divided into four sections: ideas, things, people and data.

A student can then have the computer print a list of occupations which fall in the area of his or her interests.

The list is large and may include careers as diverse as chemical engineering and acting.

A student can also request a list of jobs open to people with education in a specific major.

Discover can then print a combination of the "interests" and "education" lists to provide the student with an overall picture of how interests and possible educational major coincide--or don't.

(more)

discover--add two

To reduce the list to a more manageable size, a student may choose to begin with part three--in-depth exploration. This part presents 14 questions designed to determine what job characteristics are valued. How important is job location? Salary? Pressure?

With each answer, the list is condensed to include only those careers offering the characteristics desired.

At any time, the student can go back and choose a different major or educational degree in order to explore other career opportunities.

Beed says he hopes Discover will teach decision-making by offering students the chance to see what effect decisions have on career choice.

When a possible career is selected and the background information acquired on the education needed, students can begin a search for educational institutions, using Discover's information on two- and four-year institutions.

All information is current. ACT send new, updated software once each year to Discover users.

The advantages of Discover are many, including the vast amount of information readily available to help general-education students make career decisions.

"We need to do something to help general majors determine why to continue their education," Carlisle said.

(over)

discover--add three

Although general majors account for 23 percent of the 373 students served so far this year by Special Services, they represent 29 percent of those who completed just two quarters and 38 percent of those who dropped out after fall quarter and did not return.

Carlisle said he hopes Discover will help general-education majors find good reasons to stay in school.

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